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What Is the Sasquatch?

Based on a study of more than 1,000 reported sightings of manlike monsters, this article presents a statistical survey of the characteristics of the beings seen and of conditions under which they were sighted. The author notes similarities between these sightings and those contained in Russian studies. He concludes by making inferences from the sightings concerning the nature and distribution of the creature.

Whether a real creature is responsible for the many eyewitness reports of giant hairy bipeds in North America has not been established, and that may remain the case for many years. It can surely be assumed, however, that if such a creature does exist, then a substantial proportion of the reports involve genuine observations of it, and from them, if they prove consistent, an accurate picture of it can be drawn. It is my contention, based on the study of approximately one thousand such reports, that a consistent picture does exist and that it is not the one which is usually presented to the public. The reports portray not a semi-human, but an upright ape; not an endangered remnant of a species, but an extremely widespread and secure population; not a fearful monster, but a remarkably inoffensive animal.

If all the old and new information that has been assembled refers only to imaginary beings, then there should be no limit to the attributes with which those imaginary beings might be endowed by their creators. They could describe animals, or men, or something in between, or they could picture something or a variety of somethings entirely different. In that case anyone taking an interest in the subject is free to make of the Sasquatch whatever he chooses. There are no limitations.

But suppose that there actually is a living creature involved. If that should be the case, then it can surely be assumed that most of the stories of encounters with such a creature have a factual rather than an imaginary basis and that the information contained in the stories does in fact describe the creature. It follows that if we are in fact compiling information about a real creature then we cannot make of it whatever might suit our own fancies. It has to be the creature that the witnesses describe.

We are dealing with reports of something that walks upright like a human but is entirely covered with hair and is usually much larger than a human. I have no way of knowing how many reports about such creatures there may be, but from North America alone I have more than a thousand on file, plus several hundred more concerning footprints of a suitable size and shape for the animal described. With such a volume of reports, even allowing for the fact that an unknown number of them are manufactured or mistaken, some validity must be assumed for those attributes and actions that are frequently described, and consideration should also be given to those that are not described at all. There should be enough information to tell us not only what the creature is, but also what it is not. The following is a digest of some of the significant points that I have been able to glean from careful study of the reports:

1. Sasquatches are significantly larger than humans, and not only in height. Small hairy bipeds are reported fairly frequently, but only nine per cent of the reports involve creatures described as being smaller than men, while seventy-four per cent involve creatures larger than man-sized. Since the standard of comparison is the largest type of human, the adult male, it seems reasonable to assume that all Sasquatches are consistently taller than humans of comparable age and sex. The average of all the height estimates is more than seven and a half feet. In California and Oregon the averages exceed eight feet, and nowhere are they significantly less than seven feet. Perhaps more significant is the heavy build described. Compared to an average man, fifty-seven per cent are described as "very heavy" and thirty-four per cent as "heavy," with only six per cent "medium" and three per cent "slim." Viewed from the front, seventy-eight per cent are described as "wide" compared to an average human, and sixty-eight per cent are described as "wide" from the side view also.
2. They are solitary creatures. Only five per cent of reports involve more than one individual, and only one per cent involve more than two individuals.
3. Their hairiness is of the animal, not the human, sort. Only eight per cent of observers thought the hair was longer on the head than elsewhere on the animal, and descriptions of long head hair or of bodies only partially covered with hair do not constitute even one per cent.
4. The proportions of their limbs are more humanlike than apelike. Compared to a human and in relation to the general build, leg length is noted as "medium" in fifty-five per cent of descriptions and arm length as "medium" in fifty per cent.
5. From the shoulders up there is less resemblance to the average human. Shoulders are termed "wide" in more than ninety per cent of descriptions.

Seventy per cent of necks are "short" and twenty-five per cent have "no neck." Flat faces, large flat noses, sloped foreheads, and brow ridges are noted in nearly all descriptions resulting from close observation.

6. They are omnivorous. Gordon Strasenburgh describes such animals as herbivorous, but that cannot be supported.[1] Of sixty-four reports that I had by 1977 mentioning things apparently taken or carried for food, exactly half involved some form of meat.
7. They are largely nocturnal. In spite of the fact that there are far more human observers around in the daytime and that humans see very poorly at night, almost half of the sightings reported have been at night. The time when tracks were made is not generally known, but when it has been almost ninety per cent have been made at night.
8. They are not active in cold weather. Everywhere except in Florida there are only half as many reports in winter as in summer or fall, and tracks are rarely found in snow. Less than nine per cent of the reports, including tracks and sightings, mention snow. Oddly, there are also few reports in spring, and consistently less in May than in April. At my most recent count, out of 804 sighting and track reports for which a specific month was known only thirty-nine were in May, compared to fifty-three in April and fifty-six in June. There were forty-two in each of February and March. Leaving out the Florida reports there were thirty-six in February, thirty-seven in March and thirty-seven in May.
9. Sasquatches make considerable use of water. I have six reports of tracks ending in bodies of deep water, five reports of Sasquatches swimming, and a dozen of them standing or walking in bodies of water. In one survey I did of 289 track reports, eighty-three were beside water. Of twenty-eight reports located near towns in four states east of the continental divide, seventy-one per cent of the towns were right beside a stream or lake large enough to be shown on an ordinary road map. A sample consisting of all the towns in two counties chosen at random in each of those states indicated that on the average only fifty-one per cent of towns were beside water.

Almost all of the foregoing observations involve substantial numbers of reports, although the numbers vary from several hundred down to a few dozen. The one exception concerns details of the face and head, which are based on as few as a dozen observations. There are in addition a number of significant observations that have been reported only a few times:

1. The only time Sasquatches have been reported sleeping they were in the open, although it was snowing and there were trees close by.
2. I have six reports of running Sasquatches being clocked by people in cars.

Speeds reported were thirty-five, forty-five, fifty to sixty, seventy, and eighty miles per hour. None of those reports were from west of the continental divide, and I have not talked to any of the informants.

3. I have six reports of Sasquatches shaking or hitting vehicles, five of them jumping on vehicles, and five of them pushing at or damaging buildings.
4. I have eight reports of Sasquatches seen to throw things at people, without hitting anyone, and seventeen of them chasing people, without catching anyone. Five people have reported being rushed in what appeared to be a bluffing action. Reports of Sasquatches looking in the windows of houses and even vehicles are fairly common, but it is far more usual for a Sasquatch encountering a human to leave, often hurriedly.
5. Three people have reported being grabbed at while in their vehicles, and four have reported being picked up and dropped, but none have been much hurt. All reports of people being killed by Sasquatches, of which I have seven, have been very indirect or very old, usually both. There are perhaps a dozen reports of Sasquatches being seen to kill animals, but I have never been able to talk to any eyewitness.
6. Reports specifically identifying females and young are very rare. I have only nine substantial and specific descriptions of females and only three of young animals seen with adults.
7. One observer has reported two incidents in which it seemed that a Sasquatch did not have an opposable thumb, or at least did not use it in that way. I have no specific report of a Sasquatch using the thumb in opposition.

There are also a number of things about Sasquatches that seem to me to be significant because they have not been reported:

1. I have no report of a Sasquatch throwing anything overhand or in a straight line.
2. Although the creatures have been reported making sounds in almost nine per cent of sightings I have only one report of anything that could be considered a possible form of speech. By far the most common sounds are screams.
3. I have no report of a Sasquatch using fire.
4. I have no report of a Sasquatch using any object as a tool and only a very few and indirect reports of one carrying anything that could not be considered food.
5. I have no report of a Sasquatch having a home, even in a cave.
6. Although I have talked to people who say they have shot at Sasquatches I have no concrete evidence that anyone has ever killed one, and I have no reports indicating that they have learned to fear guns.

Those are the observations that I wish to make based on my own research. In addition, there is a collection of Russian observations published by the late Professor Boris Porshnev.[2] He notes the following points:

> Height five to six feet, but with great variations; bodies covered entirely with hair; neck appears very short with head right on top of trunk; teeth like a man's but larger; bridge of the nose usually flat; thumb less opposed than a man's, objects often grasped between fingers and palm; toes and fingers have nails, not claws; creatures capable of running as fast as horses and of swimming swift currents; breeding pairs remain together, but males range over wider territory; no permanent homes; they do not make tools, but can throw stones; both meat and vegetables eaten; they are active mainly at twilight or at night; in northern regions they sleep during the winter; they avoid leaving tracks by walking on hard ground; towards man they are not usually aggressive [3]

I do not think that anyone could fail to note that except for the size of the creatures there are not many points of difference between the reports studied by Professor Porshnev in Russia and those that I have been summarizing, while on the other hand there is exact agreement on many specific points. It should be noted, however, that the difference in size alone puts the two creatures in very different relationships to their environment. The Russian creatures are literally man-sized. There is no mention that they are any bulkier than men, and they are no taller. A six-foot man of substantial build weighs about two hundred pounds. An eight-foot creature of proportions one-and-a-half times as large would weigh about one thousand pounds, and a nine-foot one would weigh fifteen hundred pounds.

I have given the information from my own files in order to draw conclusions from it about the nature of the animal described. The Russian information, even though it may refer to a different species, will generally support the same conclusions:

1. The Sasquatch is not normally a dangerous animal.

It has the size and appearance of a monster, and it might frighten to death a person with a weak heart, but there is nothing in its record to suggest a species that preys on humans or tends to attack them for any reason. In fact if those people who tell of being grabbed or picked up are telling the truth it is a creature that makes very restrained use of its strength in its infrequent contact with humans. It is not uncommon, however, for humans to disap-

pear in wild areas and never be found, so one might bear in mind the possibility that a lone human attacked by a Sasquatch might not be able to return to tell the story.

2. The relationship between the Sasquatch and Homo sapiens has not been proven to be any closer than that between our species and the other great apes, except in shared posture and means of locomotion.

The physical attributes that we do share will make the Sasquatch a very important animal in man's quest for knowledge about himself, but it is not likely a "missing link" in his evolution or a "near human."

With the exception of his upright posture and loss of hair, man's differences from other primates are mainly in his brain, and those differences obviously result from a radical departure, a very long time ago, from the normal primate lifestyles. While all other species have relied on physical abilities and on instincts to hold a place in a competitive world, man has shifted his reliance to his brain. Millions of years ago he learned to use objects to increase the effectiveness of his muscles, and from that developed the making of tools and weapons for specific purposes. He also relied on the co-operative effort of many individuals, and somewhere along the line he learned to increase greatly the effectiveness of that co-operation through verbal communication of ideas. The precise manipulation of objects with his hands and of sounds with his throat and tongue, repeated through countless generations, have been the keys to the development of his tremendous brain. At the same time he has ceased to rely primarily on physical strength, with the result that pound for pound he has only a fraction of the muscular strength of his primate relatives.[4]

The creature described in the Sasquatch reports has obviously taken an opposite route, although by no means the same one as the other apes. Unlike them it has learned to swim, to see in the dark, and to survive in a wide variety of climates. As a result of its greater versatility it has become a highly successful species, able to establish itself, if all the reports refer to a single species, all over the world. In that respect it is like man, but unlike him its adaptions have been entirely physical. It does not need or appear to desire the company of its fellows, so it would obviously never have needed to develop sophisticated vocal communication, and there is no indication that it has done so. Its size and strength have plainly proved to be sufficient both for protection and for obtaining food without reliance on tools or weapons, and it has never even learned to throw things effectively. Hard though it may be to accept, there are reports indicating that it has developed speed of foot sufficient to flee from or to catch almost any other animal. Certainly it has never

lost its fur coat and is able to get along in cold weather without either clothing or fire.

There is simply nothing in its lifestyle that would ever have put pressure on it to develop its brain, and it obviously has not done so. Some suggestions have been made that its elusiveness in relation to man is proof of intelligence, but in fact Sasquatches are reported seen quite frequently, almost certainly more often than cougars would be if they could not be hunted with dogs. In short, if upright posture is what makes an animal a human, then the reports describe a human, but if it is his brain that distinguishes Homo sapiens from his animal relatives, then the Sasquatch is an animal—an upright ape—and nothing more.

3. The Sasquatch is not an endangered species in most of its range.

On the mountainous western slope of the continent there are may hundreds of thousands of square miles of suitable habitat for it in which pressure from humans is minimal. In fact there is far more territory available for the Sasquatches than there is for the humans, and the volume of reports from every area where there are humans to do the reporting indicates that virtually all that territory is occupied.

East of the mountains there is a wide area of level, open country that the Sasquatch apparently does not occupy, but there is nothing to suggest that it ever did. In the vast area drained by the Mississippi and its eastern tributaries as well as along the east coast there is presumably a great deal less forested area suitable for Sasquatches than was once the case, but there are plenty of reports to indicate an established population throughout the area.

There is room for disagreement as to how many animals would be required to occupy all of that territory, but considering that the number of grizzly bears, which require large territories and occupy a much smaller area, is always estimated in multiples of ten thousand, the Sasquatch population must surely number at least in the thousands. It would appear that the "skunk apes" in Florida may be endangered by the destruction of their habitat to provide land for housing, and there may be other specific areas where populations of Sasquatches are threatened, but if man does threaten Sasquatches in any way it is obviously the land developer who is responsible, not the hunter. There is no record of man ever successfully hunting a single one.

Notes

1. Gordon R. Strasenburgh, Jr., "Perceptions and Images of the Wild Man," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 9, no. 2 (1975): 281–98.
2. The work of Porshnev is discussed in my *Sasquatch: The Apes among Us* (Saanichton, B.C.: Hancock House, 1978), pp. 137–45. Russian research is presently centred around the Hominid Research Seminar which regularly meets at the Darwin Museum in Moscow. Other Russian investigators (works are listed in the general bibliography) include Dmitri Baianov and Igor Bourtsev, who have worked extensively on the Roger Patterson film, and Marie-Jeanne Kofman, who has carried out field investigations in the Caucasus.
3. Boris F. Porshnev, "The Problem of Relic Paleoanthropus," *Soviet Ethnography* 2 (1969): 115–30.
4. See John E. Bauman, "The Strength of the Chimpanzee and Orang," *Scientific Monthly* (April, 1923): 432–39.